



# Team Management

## About this Topic: Team Management



### Topic Mentor

#### Anne Donnellon

Professor Anne Donnellon of the F.W. Olin Graduate School of Business at Babson College has been researching, consulting, and teaching about teams inside organizations for more than a decade. Her approach focuses on team conversations as the vehicle for diagnosing and changing team dynamics and outcomes. She is the author of *Team Talk: The Power of Language in Team Dynamics* (Harvard Business School Press) and is the content expert for *Teams That Work* from the award-winning Interactive Manager™ Series from Harvard Business School Publishing.

### Topic Source Notes

#### Learn

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## Tips

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## Tools

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## What Would You Do?

### What would you do?

For the past six months, Esmerelda had worked hard to build trust and commitment in her group. Everything was going smoothly until Joseph joined the team. Several team members suggested that he lacked experience. And others commented that he didn't collaborate very well. Just today, Esmerelda arrived at a "team" lunch in the break room to find that the team had left Joseph behind. Esmerelda didn't understand. Joseph was extremely competent and showed real passion for his work. Esmerelda was shocked and very disappointed in her team. She rubbed her chin and wondered how to handle it.

### What would you do?

Esmerelda needs to resolve this conflict to keep her team on target. One thing she might do is meet individually with all team members—including Joseph—to see how things are going. Esmerelda should ask questions and allow team members to voice their opinions without interruptions. Above all, she should actively listen to what's being said. By better understanding the concerns of the group, she will, in turn, get to the root causes of the problem. Depending on what she hears, Esmerelda might want to follow up again with certain members of the team. Or she might hold a group meeting where she revisits the goals and objectives of the team, and discusses how the group needs to work together to accomplish these goals.

In this topic, you'll learn how to instill commitment in your team, improve communication among group members, and diagnose common problems that can derail a team.

Esmerelda's team has ostracized a productive member of her group. But why? And how can she get her team back on target?

## Topic Objectives

This topic helps you:

- Diagnose common problems that can impede team progress
- Take corrective measures to remove team problems and improve performance
- Resolve team conflicts
- Promote interdependence within teams
- Improve your team leadership skills

## You can keep your team on target



Imagine that you're leading a team. Things have gone well so far: the members are working well together, the team is progressing toward its objectives. Suddenly, however, problems arise. Perhaps two members get embroiled in a personal conflict or the team as a whole can't seem to make decisions. Maybe communication within the team becomes unproductive—some members aren't contributing to discussions, while others are interrupting one another frequently.

Whatever the problem, you must take action if you want your team to succeed. To keep your team on target, you must constantly evaluate its performance and make necessary mid-course corrections. You also have to understand the kinds of obstacles that derail a team and develop techniques to remove those obstacles.

## Evaluate team performance

All evaluations of team performance must focus on two things:

- **Team results**—as defined by the team's objectives (such as "enhanced product quality" or "faster delivery time")

- **Team process**—or the way in which the team is achieving its results (such as how well members are resolving conflicts, cultivating positive interpersonal relationships, sharing information, or managing project budgets and schedules)

## Evaluate team process

When a team faces internal obstacles, an evaluation of **team process** becomes particularly crucial. There are several methods by which you can gauge the quality of your team's process. The table below provides some examples.

**Ways to Evaluate Team Process**

Method	Definition	Example
Benchmarking	The team compares its process to that of other, similar teams in the company.	A team charged with improving customer service compares the level of trust and member participation in weekly meetings with those same processes in a team in another department.
Outside observer	An external consultant observes the team and objectively evaluates its process.	A team developing an employee survey hires a consultant to analyze the quality of its interpersonal relationships. The consultant draws on his or her knowledge of other teams and team dynamics to suggest changes.
Ongoing team discussions	Team members engage in	A team evaluating new marketing databases meets

	regular, informal discussions to assess their process.	weekly to discuss progress, including how well the team is managing deadlines, meeting budget goals, and solving problems.
Project debriefing sessions	After the team completes a task, members meet to identify what went well and what didn't.	A team designing a new self-service employee benefits system meets after completing the Web site for the project. Members discuss how well the team learned new skills and collaborated while creating the site.

## Identify obstacles to team progress

Teams can encounter numerous obstacles as they work toward their objectives. Here are some of the more common problems and examples of behaviors that characterize each of them.

### Team Problems

Problem	Characteristic behaviors
Absence of team identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Failure of members to feel mutually accountable to one another for the team's objectives</li> <li>• Lack of commitment and effort from team members</li> <li>• Conflict between team goals and members' personal goals</li> <li>• Poor collaboration, information sharing, and joint decision making</li> </ul>

Difficulty making decisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rigid adherence to positions during decision making</li> <li>• Repeated arguments that fail to introduce new information</li> </ul>
Poor communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interrupting or talking over one another among members</li> <li>• Consistent silence from some members during meetings</li> <li>• Allusions to problems but failure to formally address them</li> <li>• False consensus (everyone nods in agreement without truly agreeing)</li> </ul>
Inability to resolve conflicts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tensions and personal attacks</li> <li>• Arguments</li> <li>• Absence of support for others</li> <li>• Aggressive gestures</li> </ul>
Lack of participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Failure to complete assignments</li> <li>• Poor attendance at team meetings</li> <li>• Low energy during meetings</li> </ul>
Lack of creativity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inability to generate fresh ideas and perspectives unencumbered by prevailing wisdom or established ways of doing things</li> <li>• Unwillingness to ask questions or be curious and playful</li> <li>• Failure to turn unexpected events into opportunities</li> </ul>
Groupthink	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unwillingness or inability to consider alternative ideas</li> <li>• Lack of critical thinking and debate over ideas</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overriding impulse for team agreement and unity</li> </ul>
Ineffective leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Failure of members to contribute ideas</li> <li>• Inability to define a vision for the team</li> <li>• Failure of leader to delegate</li> <li>• Failure of leader to represent multiple constituencies</li> </ul>

## Activity: How is your team doing?

This assessment can provide you with a focus for the discussion, "How well are we doing as a team?"

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For each of the following questions, rate your team's effectiveness on a scale of one to five, with "1" representing an area in need of improvement, and "5" representing an area of strength. Record your answers manually as you go.

1. Achieving our goals/purpose
2. Improving our process
3. Feeling a sense of team identity
4. Making decisions
5. Communicating
6. Resolving conflicts
7. Participating in the team
8. Generating creative ideas and solutions
9. Combating groupthink
10. Ensuring effective team leadership

Tally your score, and select it from the answer options below; a total of fifty points were available.

☐ Score range 0-20

The higher your team's score, the more productive and functional your team is. Your score indicates that your team would benefit significantly from taking a more rigorous approach to team cohesion and cooperation. Look again at the criteria you rated. For

each criterion that you rated with a 1, 2, or 3, ask yourself what you might start doing now in order to improve in that area. As a first step, be sure to visit the sections of this Topic that correspond with your low ratings in each category.

☐ Score range 21-40

The higher your team's score, the more productive and functional your team is. Your score indicates that your team would benefit somewhat from taking a more rigorous approach to team cohesion and cooperation. Look again at the criteria you rated. For each criterion that you rated with a 1, 2, or 3, ask yourself what you might start doing now in order to improve in that area. As a first step, be sure to visit the sections of this Topic that correspond with your low ratings in each category.

☐ Score range 41-50

The higher your team's score, the more productive and functional your team is. Your score indicates that your team is already very effective, with high levels of team cohesion and cooperation. Still, to ensure that you're as effective as possible, look again at the criteria you rated. For each criterion that you rated with a 1, 2, or 3, ask yourself what you might start doing now in order to improve in that area. As a first step, be sure to visit the sections of this Topic that correspond with your low ratings in each category.

## Key Idea: Why is team identity important?

### Key Idea

Team identity—members' sense that they share a bond and a purpose—is critical for any team's success. Why?

- **Team identity encourages mutual accountability for results.** When team members see themselves as mutually accountable for achieving results, they help teammates who are struggling or falling behind. Poor performers feel motivated to do better. And members drop the "I did my share" attitude that weakens performance. In fact, some experts view mutual accountability as the single most important contributor to team performance.
- **Team identity also evokes commitment and effort.** It creates the sense that members share a common interest in the team's success. With team identity, people become more willing to collaborate, share information, make a greater effort, make joint decisions, and put team goals ahead of personal goals. A strong team identity helps keep teams on target.

Team identity may be hard to define, but it's crucial for a team's success.

## What causes weak team identity?

Team identity can be weak for several reasons:



- **Newness of the team.** It's natural for new teams to suffer from some lack of identity. A feeling of team identity builds as people have opportunities to interact, discuss a common goal, or join forces in attacking a problem.
- **New members.** When new members join the team after the work has begun, team identity can suffer if newcomers are disruptive or made to feel like outsiders.
- **Diversity of members.** The very differences that give a team its potential for high performance can sometimes make it difficult for members to develop a sense of team identity. Why? Differing assumptions, cultural backgrounds, and ways of working and thinking can lead to misunderstandings or tensions among members.

For example, on a Research and Development team comprising members from three different nations, people from a country whose culture values formality might bristle if their counterparts from another nation address them in casual terms.

## How might you foster team identity?

“ A successful team is a group of many hands but of one mind. ”  
 –Bill Bethel

As a team leader, you *can* take steps to strengthen team identity while maintaining members' valuable differences. Consider these techniques:

- **Reiterate the team's common goals.** Frequently revisit the team's shared goals and purpose to remind people that the work they are doing is important not just to the team, but to the organization as well.
- **Encourage collaborative work.** Find as many opportunities as possible to get people working together. Nothing builds team identity like collaborating side by side on a challenge.
- **Strengthen bonding.** Create opportunities for members to know each other.

For example, through lunches in the team room, an off-site outing, or other events. Stereotypes such as "those engineers are hard to work with" will gradually disappear.

- **Implant a sense of urgency.** When team members feel that their work is crucial, they try harder to reach goals and they feel compelled to join together to meet the challenge at hand. To create a sense of urgency, impress upon the team how their work will solve a serious problem or benefit the company.
- **Recognize the value of team differences.** Publicly acknowledge the value of differences among team members, and explain how those differences serve the team's common goal.

For example, two members who bring different perspectives on customers' needs can stimulate creative ideas among other members on how to develop innovative products.

- **Create engaging activities.** Encourage members to take part in activities they find interesting and valuable, such as defining a team charter or developing a schedule for completing a major task. Such activities will keep them focused on team's objectives.
- **Recruit team members selectively.** Ask people who see the team's goals as important and worthwhile to join your team. These individuals will be predisposed to achieve the goals rather than focus on differences within the team.

- **Integrate newcomers.** Be particularly attentive to team identity when new members join the team after work has commenced. Newcomers are bound to feel like outsiders at first. Quickly engage newcomers in team projects so that they feel welcome and integrated into the group. If appropriate, hold a welcome lunch or other small social event to mark a new member's arrival.
- **Recognize skills.** Find opportunities to recognize the skills and contributions of individual members and explain how their efforts have helped the team progress toward its goals. This will make team members feel valued and appreciated, and strengthen their commitment to the group.
- **Use outward symbols.** Consider using emblems such as team T-shirts or hats to help people identify with the team and its values.

## Leadership Insight: On the line

I've been working with a multinational team in Asia, and it's taught me a lot about working with global teams and how to lead them and manage them and be of help to them.

This particular team is spread across six countries: Thailand, Australia, India, Indonesia, Singapore, the Philippines. And as you can imagine, the people speak different languages, although everyone speaks English as one of their languages. But they have very different underlying values and cultural assumptions about the way people behave in organizations.

What I've found is that it's really important to talk about those things, so that when the teams are working together, particularly under pressure, they don't get into trouble.

An example of that would be: This particular team, the project that they're working on is sponsored by the CEOs of each of their companies. So they're going to be interacting as a team with some of the very senior people from each of their companies — which of course is stressful for any of us.

In this case, what I decided to do was have them imagine that there was a line on the floor and say that at one of end of this line, this is for people who would never do anything to embarrass their boss in public — which would include not giving them negative feedback, not disagreeing with them, not doing anything that would be seen as disrespectful.

At the other end of this line are people that think that disagreeing with your boss in public is just fine. It's not a problem. That's part of the creative give and take of an organization, and they would be very quick to speak up and disagree with their boss.

And I looked out at this room full of people and said, "Now just put yourself on that line, wherever you feel comfortable." I tell you, they just split almost into two, with a few people in the middle. But they basically went to the two extremes.

At one end, as you can imagine, people like the Australians and the Indians, who are known for being outspoken and not being particularly hierarchical, went to one end. At the other end, you had the Indonesians and the Thais, the Singaporeans — all people who are very respectful of authority in public settings — went to the other end.

And what that did was give us an opportunity to talk about how, in fact, we were going to manage interactions with the senior executives of all these different companies, so that the outspoken folks didn't embarrass the respectful folks, and the respectful folks didn't lose the advantage of being smart and interactive to their outspoken colleagues.

There are lots of things — this is just one little example of the many cultural differences that global teams bring. The important lesson from this is to talk about those differences and have strategies for dealing with them so that they don't surprise us, particularly when we're in the middle of a big project.

When managing international teams, surface cultural differences at the outset to avoid misunderstandings later.

**June Delano**  
**Founding Partner, The ClearLake Group**

June Delano is a Managing Partner of Pivotal Leadership, a leadership consulting firm in Southeast Asia, and a Founding Partner of The ClearLake Group, a global advisory firm focused on strategy and organization.

June has consulted in many industries and has led projects in Asia, Europe, Latin America, and the Americas. She is known for a deep understanding of the relationship between strategy, culture and learning, as well as ground-breaking approaches to leadership development.

She was a leader of the executive development practice at The Monitor Group, and previously held multiple positions at the Eastman Kodak Company, including Director of Worldwide Learning and Development, and Director of Executive and Management Development.

She has authored multiple articles, including "Communicating Across Differences: The Case for Becoming a Cosmopolitan Coach," published in the International Journal of Coaching in Organizations.

June holds a Bachelor of Arts in journalism from Michigan State University and a Master of Science in organization development from American University. She has studied psychology, leadership, and organization development at The Fielding Institute, the Gestalt Institute of Cleveland, and NTL Institute.

## Recognize when your team is stuck



Have you ever found yourself in the following situation? You're leading a team and members are discussing an important decision during a meeting. To your dismay, the conversation is going nowhere—people are rigidly adhering to their positions and unable to reach agreement. Despite repeated arguments, no one has provided any new information to move the decision-making process forward. Worse, in two preceding meetings, you've seen your team get into this same dead-end situation.

Somehow, your team is "stuck" in the decision-making process. You know that you need to take action. After all, a team that can't agree on decisions either wastes a lot of time or ends up arriving at choices that team members do not wholeheartedly support.

## Key Idea: Adhere to one decision-making approach

### Key Idea

As part of forming your team, you probably helped members agree on *who* would make team decisions and *how* decision-making would unfold.

You may have selected one of these four common decision-making methods:

- **The first method is majority rule.** Members discuss the decision and then vote. The choice receiving more than 50% of the votes is adopted.
- **Consensus is the second method.** Every member must agree to adopt a proposed decision. If consensus is impossible, new alternatives are developed and presented for evaluation.
- **Third is small group.** A subset of individuals with relevant experience and skills make specific decisions.
- **And the final method is leader with input.** You, as the team leader, gather input from members and use the information to make decisions.

Whatever approach you and your team agreed on, examine the process the team is now using to make decisions. Ask yourself: "Is the team following the agreed-upon approach?" If not, remind members of the agreement and take steps to restore adherence to the method you selected.

Adhering to a decision-making approach helps teams avoid unproductive debate. What decision-making approach does *your* team use?

## Consider changing your decision-making approach

Sometimes the decision-making method a team selects early on no longer supports the team's work going forward, and decision making unravels.

For example, a team chose consensus as its decision process, but as the work unfolded, the team had less time to complete its work than it originally assumed. The team found it increasingly difficult to reach consensus under mounting time pressure. Because the consensus method requires more time than other methods, the team opted to change to the small group method instead.

## Look for smaller areas of agreement

If your team gets bogged down in trying to reach agreement on a big decision, break the decision into smaller pieces that may be easier to agree on.

For example, suppose the team is trying to select one of three product designs and can't seem to come to agreement. Focus members' attention on smaller aspects of the decision—for example, by asking: "What are the most important features that the new product needs to have?" If members can agree on the answer to that question, they may find it easier to agree on the selection of the product design.

## Ask what needs to happen in order to reach agreement

By asking what needs to happen in order for team members to reach agreement, you may receive valuable insights.

For instance, suppose your team is trying to define the scope of a consultant's work. You ask the group, "What needs to happen for you to agree?" Several members respond to your question with comments such as, "We need to understand how this engagement is going to impact our budget," or "We need to know that we can trust the person we select."

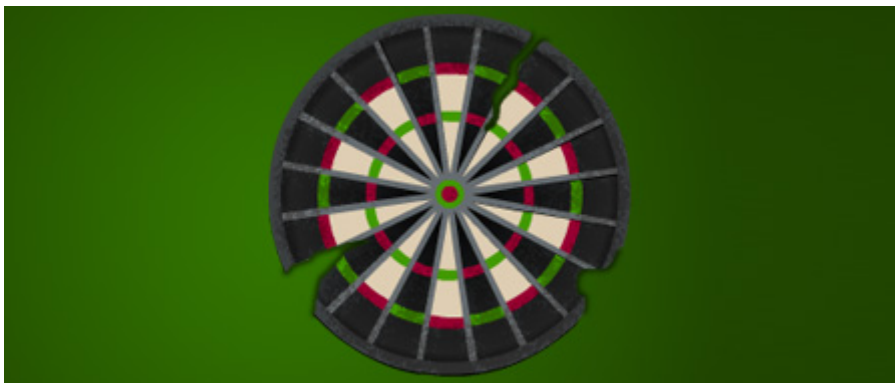
In this case, such comments may signal that the team could come to agreement if it gathered more information about the consultant's fees or did more research on the consultant's references and previous projects.

## Discuss the consequences of failure to make decisions

By reminding team members of the damage that decision-making problems can cause, you may motivate them to improve their decision-making process. Point out consequences of unproductive decision making, such as:

- Lost time
- Poor choices
- Decisions that many team members won't support
- Erosion of morale within the team
- Wasted energy
- Diverting of the team's attention from its goals

## Poor communication is destructive



When team members communicate poorly, a team can suffer a number of negative consequences. Troubled communication can cause interpersonal conflict in the form of personal attacks, sarcasm, and arguing. It can also cause team members to interrupt or talk over one another during meetings, to remain silent, or to hint at problems while never formally addressing them.

Perhaps the most destructive consequence of poor communication for teams is difficulty in reaching an informed decision. When team members withhold information or attack one another's ideas, the ability to generate creative solutions to problems is stifled, and bad decisions result.

Teams can't work toward their goals if members don't communicate constructively. If you've diagnosed communication problems in your team, you need to take action quickly. The following measures can help.

## Leadership Insight: Seek feedback

The Columbia space shuttle exploded in February of 2003. Linda Ham was the leader of the mission management team. She was in charge of that shuttle mission. It's important to note her leadership or some of the flaws in the way she approached the leadership during that crisis.

During the key meetings that took place while the astronauts were in space, there were some concerns raised around the fact that insulating foam had fallen off the shuttle during the launch, concerns that this could imperil the safety of the astronauts — and of course that is what caused their deaths when the shuttle tried to return to Earth.

And yet, she ran her team meetings in a way that made it very difficult for lower-level engineers to voice their concerns. In fact some of them never spoke during the meetings about the fact that they thought the astronauts were in danger.

And during the investigative board meetings that took place after the tragedy, someone asked her, "How do you get out dissenting opinions?" And she said, "Well, when I hear about them." And they said, "By their very nature, Ms. Ham, you know, you may not hear about them." And she said, "Well, I do when somebody comes forward and tells me about them." And they said, "But what techniques do you use to get these dissenting views out on the table?" And she really didn't have an answer.

And the lesson of that story is that she exercised very passive leadership, actually very typical of most managers: that they assemble a great team of experts, and they sort of expect to then hear all of their views, and to have all of the relevant knowledge come to the table. It's sort of like saying "I have an open door, come to me."

If you're waiting for bad news to come through the open door, you will be waiting a long time. Most of the time the only thing that walks through your door is the good news. And so the lesson from Linda Ham is: You need to go out the door and really reach out and draw out potentially what the bad news is, what the concerns are.

And you need to realize that your team isn't naturally going to bring those forward. She needed an answer to how you're going to get those dissenting views on the table and she had a very passive response, which is: "I assembled a great team; well of course they will tell me about any problems."



And that's just not the case in many instances. So, it's a great example of how we can improve our team leadership by becoming more active in seeking out alternative views and getting the team to understand that these are welcome at the table.

Actively seek alternative views from your team.

**Michael Roberto**  
**Professor, Bryant University**

Michael Roberto is a preeminent authority on strategic decision making, senior management teams, and neutralizing hidden threats to organizations.

Professor Roberto has studied how interpersonal dynamics cause catastrophic organizational failures (such as the Columbia Space Shuttle accident and the 1996 Mount Everest tragedy) and how to structure decision-making processes for success. He helps senior executives build the consensus that successful implementation of a strategy requires and uncover potential disasters before they destroy an organization's strategy.

His newest book, "Know What You Don't Know", helps business leaders find and prevent problems before they happen. In his previous book, "Why Great Leaders Don't Take Yes for an Answer: Managing for Conflict and Consensus," Professor Roberto shows how to manage the interpersonal dimensions of decision making — the social, political, and emotional aspects that so often determine success.

He is the Trustee Professor of Management at Bryant University. Professor Roberto served for six years on the faculty at Harvard Business School and has been a Visiting Associate Professor of Management at New York University's Stern School of Business.

## Focus on behavior, not character

Encourage team members to express their anger or frustration in terms of other people's behavior, rather than their personal character. In addition, remind people to use "I" language rather than "you" language. With "I" language, people describe the impact of another person's behavior on them.

For instance, suppose Sue is angry with Timothy for missing a deadline. In this case, it's more productive for her to say, "When you missed the deadline, I ended up finishing my part of the project late." If she instead told Timothy, "You clearly aren't committed to this project," he would almost certainly feel that she was attacking his character—and become defensive in response.

## Create norms governing contentious discussion

Acknowledge to your team that contentious conversations will almost inevitably occur as members work out solutions to problems, make decisions, and explore ideas. The question isn't *whether* contentiousness will arise, but rather *how* your team will deal with it when it does take place.

Work with your team to define rules about how to have a contentious discussion. Whenever necessary, revisit the rules and remind people to follow them. The rules teams develop vary from team to team, but some examples might include the following:

- "Wait for another person to finish speaking before jumping into the conversation."
- "Acknowledge the value of another person's idea, even if you don't agree with it."
- "If you disagree with someone, explain the reasons behind your position."

## Actively solicit team members' views

In any team, it's common for some people to dominate discussions and others to remain quieter. The longer the team works together, the more entrenched members get in these roles—and the more the team loses out on valuable input from all members.

Take steps to ensure that all members contribute their views and ideas during team discussions and meetings. Again, establishing communication norms can help.

For example, "If you notice someone remaining silent during a discussion, invite him or her to provide input"; "During any discussion, each team member must provide input one at a time—no matter how brief"; or "We will examine all opposing points of view."

## Use meeting time wisely



Insist that everyone be familiar with the agenda and any required informational reading materials before coming to a team meeting. During meetings, focus on problem solving rather than information sharing. If the discussion strays, steer it back to items on the meeting agenda. And discuss new business at the end of the meeting.

## Focus people's attention on team goals

Talking about goals helps to focus team communication and direct people's attention away from interpersonal conflicts or other distractions. To improve communication, revisit the team's initial purpose periodically. And write frequent progress reports to be distributed to all team members. When people see their progress in writing, they'll be able to communicate about the team's effort in a focused way.

## The four steps to resolving conflicts





Conflicts within a team can take numerous forms—from tensions and arguments to an unwillingness to support others. Left unresolved, such conflicts can destroy a team's ability to progress toward its goals.

How can you avoid this scenario and bring a conflict to resolution? Experts recommend the following steps.

## Define the root cause of the conflict

When conflict arises in your team, ask yourself the following questions:

- "Why are team members arguing with each other?"
- "Is there a deeper personality conflict here?"
- "Is one member being stubborn?"
- "Does one member always insist on getting his or her way?"

Your answers to these questions will help you uncover the conflict's root cause—whether it's a behavior or a situation.

## Key Idea: Negotiate a resolution

### Key Idea

Avoid dictating a resolution to the conflict. Instead, negotiate a solution that everyone involved can live with. Point out the importance of agreeing to disagree on certain issues. Remind people that if one member bullies the rest of the team into accepting his or her viewpoint, the rest of the members will resent that person and not support the decision.

Encourage members to find common ground and explore new possibilities.

For example, suppose two team members are arguing over the best way to complete a report on time. Don't allow the team to "gang up" on a member who has a different idea. Ensure that each member feels safe in offering a divergent opinion. In this case, you might say, "You both want the same result here—a report finished on time. But you're recommending different ways to get there. Let's discuss the pros and cons of the two different approaches you're arguing over, as well as bring some additional alternatives into the picture. That way, we'll stand a better chance of selecting the best solution."

Dictating a resolution to a team conflict can backfire. You need to negotiate a solution that works for all members of your team.

## Encourage active listening

During discussions designed to resolve a conflict, team members must learn to become active listeners. That is, they must be able to:

- Restate points made by a speaker, to demonstrate that they've understood what the speaker is saying
- Control behavior that suggests a lack of interest in the speaker; for instance, doodling, fidgeting, or interrupting while someone else is talking
- Ask questions that encourage a speaker to expand on his or her points with further information or lines of reasoning
- Refer back to points made earlier and build on those ideas
- Ask speakers to explain the reasons behind their opinions

"No interrupting" is an especially crucial rule for active listening. If necessary, remind team members of the following:

- Each person has the right to offer his or her ideas and solutions to problems without interruption.
- Each person should be able to finish his or her thoughts even if one or more other team members disagree.
- Often, there isn't just one right answer to a conflict or problem. A team needs to consider a broad range of possible solutions before feeling confident that it has selected the best one.
- Holding in angry feelings will only lead to resentment. Letting everyone share his or her frustrations in a constructive way will let the team move on to solutions.
- One of the reasons a team is created is to get varying opinions on how to solve problems. Allowing people with different perspectives and skills to voice their ideas without interruption is one good way to gather those opinions.

## Activity: Help Jared listen actively

Active listening can help you resolve team conflicts—if you demonstrate the *right* behaviors.

Jared would like objective feedback on his active listening skills. He has asked you to listen to a tape of his latest discussion with Bianca and to tell him where his skills need improvement.

**Bianca:** Jared, I'm sorry to disturb you, but I just don't understand our policy about client communication.

**Jared:** Have a seat, Bianca.

**Bianca:** I know that Raimi is the project manager, but I don't think it's productive to *always* have to go through him whenever I need to meet with a member of the client team.

**Jared:** Go on.

**Bianca:** When we're planning an event, it takes *forever* to get things done, because I have to pass all of my information through Raimi, [*Jared fidgets; a memo catches his eye*] and then wait

for the answers from him. He's so busy that I don't always get the information in time.

**Jared:** So you're confused by our policy on communicating with a client, because you think it's sometimes unproductive and hampers your ability to perform key tasks.

**Bianca:** Exactly.

**Jared:** What do you think we should be doing instead?

**Bianca:** Well, I think we could make an exception to the policy—maybe only during event planning—that would allow me to contact their administrator directly to work out logistics.

**Jared:** You'd like an exception to the policy during event planning. Well, I'll talk to Raimi and see what I can do.

Jared would like objective feedback on his active listening skills. He has asked you to listen to a tape of his latest discussion with Bianca and to tell him where his skills need improvement.

**Bianca:** Jared, I'm sorry to disturb you, but I just don't understand our policy about client communication.

**Jared:** Have a seat, Bianca.

**Bianca:** I know that Raimi is the project manager, but I don't think it's productive to *always* have to go through him whenever I need to meet with a member of the client team.

**Jared:** Go on.

**Bianca:** When we're planning an event, it takes *forever* to get things done, because I have to pass all of my information through Raimi, *Jared fidgets; a memo catches his eye*] and then wait for the answers from him. He's so busy that I don't always get the information in time.

**Jared:** So you're confused by our policy on communicating with a client, because you think it's sometimes unproductive and hampers your ability to perform key tasks.

**Bianca:** Exactly.

**Jared:** What do you think we should be doing instead?

**Bianca:** Well, I think we could make an exception to the policy—maybe only during event planning—that would allow me to contact their administrator directly to work out logistics.

**Jared:** You'd like an exception to the policy during event planning. Well, I'll talk to Raimi and see what I can do.

Identify the behaviors that Jared demonstrated in this conversation.

☐ Restated points made by Bianca, interrupted Bianca, and suggested a lack of interest at times.

**Not the best choice.** Though Jared did restate Bianca's points and suggest a lack of interest, he did not interrupt her.

☐ Asked Bianca to explain the reasons behind her opinions and referred back to points she made earlier.

**Not the best choice.** Jared did not explicitly do these things.

☐ Restated points made by Bianca, asked questions that encouraged her to expand on her points, and suggested a lack of interest at times.

**Correct choice.** Jared did these things throughout the conversation.

## Remind team members to forgive

Once your team has resolved a conflict, remind people to forgive one another for any hurt feelings or damaged egos. Point out that forgiveness is not a sign of weakness or of a propensity to "give in." Rather, it enables people to let go of any anger left over from a conflict—and prevent the anger from poisoning future encounters among team members.

## Detecting low participation



A team can't succeed if some or all of its members don't participate wholeheartedly in its work, meetings, and social events. How do you detect low participation in your team? Watch for members' failure to complete assignments, as well as poor attendance at team meetings and get-togethers aimed at celebrating achievement of major milestones. During meetings, observe team members and gauge their energy level. Lackluster energy and attention are additional symptoms of poor participation.

## Confirm expectations about participation

When you formed your team, did you establish rules for participation—such as the following?

- "Members must attend every meeting and arrive at meetings on time."
- "We agree to complete all assignments that we signed up for."
- "Each of us is accountable to one another for coming to meetings prepared."

If you did establish such norms, revisit them in a team meeting, and ask members whether they still agree on the rules. If so, reiterate the need for these norms: They ensure broad participation across the entire team. Acknowledge that outside pressures and demanding schedules can sometimes make it hard for people to participate in the team as fully as they should. But stress the importance of participation.

If team members no longer believe that certain participation norms are valuable, ask why. If necessary, create new norms—but ensure that they specifically encourage participation. And most important, if participation norms are not currently in place, consider creating some immediately.

## Make it easier to meet expectations about participation

If team members are having difficulty fulfilling agreed-upon expectations about participation, find out why and then develop solutions to make the situation better.

For example, suppose some members of your team have been coming to meetings unprepared.

Develop ways to ensure that people are better prepared. These might include establishing several new rules, such as:

- All reading materials for meetings should be distributed to team members at least three days before the meeting.
- The person who distributes reading materials before a meeting should include a note explaining what readers are expected to do with the material—for instance, "For your information only," "To make a decision on the product prototype," "To generate suggestions for new features in the Information Technology system we're considering."

Solutions might also include new processes.

For instance, if people are having trouble completing assignments, trace the events that led up to the delays (such as bottlenecks) and identify ways to redistribute work among team members so that bottlenecks are then eliminated.

## Ask for explanations

At times, simply asking people why they're having trouble participating can reveal valuable information you can then use to develop solutions. Asking for explanations can also uncover problems that you and other team members weren't aware of.

For example, suppose that Eric, a member of a project team you're leading, has been reticent during meetings. In this case, you might take Eric aside and say, "I've noticed that you've been pretty quiet during our weekly meetings, and I'm concerned that we're missing out on your ideas for this project. What's going on?"

Suppose that Eric responds, "I'm feeling overloaded. My boss asked me to submit a project two weeks earlier than planned. I've had to work overtime to meet that deadline and still fulfill my commitments to this team. I've been exhausted."

Your exchange with Eric has uncovered information that may suggest helpful changes.

For instance, if it turns out that Eric expects his regular job responsibilities to be unusually demanding for the next two weeks, you might consider asking another team member to take over part of his team-related tasks for that period of time. Once Eric's regular job is back under control, he can then resume his team commitments.

## Assess fit between team members and tasks

In some cases, low participation stems from a poor fit between team members and the tasks they've been assigned or have agreed to take on.

For example, suppose you're leading a team charged with developing an employee benefits survey. You've assigned Mary the task of creating the survey because she has a strong writing background. As the project unfolds, it turns out that Mary lacks the design skills needed to complete the survey. Thus, she has been having difficulty meeting interim deadlines.

In such cases, it's vital to identify what's causing the poor fit and take steps to address it.

For instance, you could work out a plan that would enable Mary to work with an outside designer who could suggest some design templates. Or you could consider asking Mary to write the survey and shift the survey's design to a person more experienced in this area.

## The importance of creativity



Creativity—the ability to approach a problem in an original and flexible way—is an important element in most team-based work. Creativity helps team members generate fresh perspective, spot opportunities that they hadn't anticipated, and develop innovative solutions to problems.

As the leader of your team, you can do several things to foster creativity among team members.

## Promote diversity of styles and skills

Teams can achieve greater creative output than individuals working alone because they bring a greater sum of varied competencies, insights, experiences, and energy to the effort. But in order to reap greater output, groups must have the right composition of thinking styles and technical skills, which, in most cases, means a *diversity* of styles and skills. That variety has several benefits:

- Individual differences can produce the creative friction that sparks new ideas.
- Diversity of thought and perspective are a safeguard against the tendency of peoples' ideas to converge around a particular point of view.
- Diversity of thought and skills gives good ideas more opportunities to develop.

Team leaders thus need to consider how teams are staffed and how the individuals within them communicate.

## Leadership Insight: Generation gaps

Generational differences matter. I'll give you an example. I called my son. He's a Gen X'er, late 30s. I called him when he was just starting a brand-new job, and I said, "Is it OK if I call you here?" And there was dead silence on the other end. He said nothing for several seconds. And finally, his answer was, "Well, it better be."

In other words, he didn't even understand the question I was asking. Now, I'm a Boomer. And back in the day, we had a lot of rules and regulations, and one of them is you didn't make or accept personal phone calls at work. But, the Gen X'ers have been raised as latchkey kids, many of them. They're independent. They're self-starters.

They're self-managing. They will not tolerate micromanagement or a whole lot of rules. So, if you're a manager, it could be helpful and useful to know that about them.

Another example is with the Gen Y group, the youngest group now in the workforce. So, one manager pushed back when I was asking him, "What are you doing to retain Gen Ys?" His answer was, "Nothing. I'm not going to do anything different for them than I do for anyone else." Turns out, they had asked him if they could paint the walls of the office and if they could work with their iPods. And his answer was no, flat-out no.

Well, he gave it some thought. And later he wrote me an e-mail, and he said, "You won't believe this. I decided, why not, give it a try. The walls of the offices are now purple, and they're working with these things stuck in their ears, their iPods. Performance has skyrocketed. They're thrilled. They thank me almost every day for showing that kind of flexibility."

Every generation has its priorities. Understand them, and you get the best from your team.

### **Sharon Jordan-Evans** **President, The Jordan Evans Group**

Sharon Jordan-Evans is a pioneer in the field of employee retention and engagement.

She coauthored the Wall Street Journal bestseller "Love 'Em or Lose 'Em: Getting Good People to Stay" with Beverly Kaye, which is now in its fourth edition and has been translated into 20 languages.

Her follow-up book, "Love It, Don't Leave It: 26 Ways to Get What You Want at Work," also became a Wall Street Journal bestseller and has been translated into 15 languages.

Sharon runs a consulting company, The Jordan Evans Group, where she coaches high-performing executives and speaks to audiences about engagement and retention.

As a corporate coach and keynote presenter, she works with Fortune 500 companies such as AMEX, Boeing, Disney, Monster, Lockheed, and Sony. Her Web site is: [www.jeg.org](http://www.jeg.org)

**Key Idea: Balance the paradoxical characteristics of your team**



## Key Idea

To function effectively, a team needs a balance of several different qualities.

For example, it needs skilled expertise as well as fresh, inexperienced perspectives.

To strike this balance, bring in outsiders to augment the more seasoned members.

A team must also work within the confines of real business needs while having the latitude to determine how it will meet those needs. To achieve this balance, make business needs clear while letting your team make decisions about how to reach its goals.

A balance of professionalism and play can also help. Creativity thrives on playfulness, but business must be conducted professionally. To maintain this balance, provide time and space for play, but clarify the appropriate times and places.

Finally, a team must plan projects carefully while also improvising when projects inevitably don't go as planned. To balance planning with improvisation, encourage team members to look for ways to turn unexpected events into opportunities. And keep plans flexible enough to incorporate new ideas.

Successful teams require a mixture of paradoxical traits. What are these traits and how can you keep them in balance?

## Manage divergent and convergent thinking

A team's creativity stems from two types of thinking:

- **Divergent thinking:** seeing and doing things in a range of nontraditional ways, and viewing familiar things from a variety of new angles
- **Convergent thinking:** channeling the results of divergent thinking into concrete proposals for action

## From divergent to convergent

To generate the *most* creativity, a team needs to engage first in divergent thinking, and then in convergent thinking.

During divergent thinking, team members ask questions that haven't been asked before, analyze problems and situations from different perspectives, and make connections among facts or events that others have missed. Divergent thinking generates a wide variety of options that in turn trigger new insights and ideas.

Once the team has completed its divergent-thinking sessions, it moves to *convergent* thinking. Convergent thinking answers the question: "Are the insights we've generated valuable?" Through convergent thinking, team members evaluate the ideas generated by divergent thinking to determine which are genuinely novel—and which are worth pursuing.

Convergence sets limits, narrowing the field of solutions within a given set of constraints. How do you determine those constraints? Your company's culture, mission, priorities, and high-level context for the



team's project all contribute to the answer. They help you rule out options that lie beyond the scope of your project. But you can facilitate this process by asking specific questions.

For example, suppose your team is developing a new product. In this case, you might ask:

- "Which functions are essential from the customer's point of view?"
- "What are the cost constraints? Which of our ideas would fit within those constraints?"
- "How soon must the project be completed? Which of our ideas can we implement within that timeline?"

## What is "groupthink"?



As a team leader, you want your group to be close-knit and feel a strong sense of team identity. Without that cohesiveness, the team can't make decisions, solve problems, and work toward its goals. But every close-knit team can fall victim to a pattern of thought called **groupthink**. And the more close-knit the team is, the higher the risk.

Groupthink is an undesirable condition in which the members of a group think alike to the point where members become unwilling to raise objections or concerns about a project even though these concerns are legitimate and based on hard data. A team's convergence of thinking is driven by social psychological pressures, such as individuals' needs to highlight similarities or suppress differences.

## Why is groupthink dangerous?

While some convergence of thinking can engender cooperation and help a team focus on goals, make decisions, and follow agreed-upon norms of behavior, the convergence of opinion that escalates to groupthink is dangerous to a team, for several reasons:

- It curtails critical thinking and debate—two essential ingredients for an effective team.
- The impulse for team agreement and unity takes priority over objectivity—which the team needs to weigh options and make informed decisions.
- As diversity of views gives way to convergence in team members' thinking, people experience an illusion of certitude. They feel that it is no longer necessary for them to consider alternatives.
- Team members who "think otherwise" may be "reeducated" or pushed out of the team—worsening the tendency toward groupthink.

Why does groupthink happen? Some experts maintain that opinion within groups tends to converge as members become aware of their peers' opinion. Perhaps owing to a lack of self-confidence, team

members become reluctant to offer viewpoints that are out of step with others.

## Recognize the symptoms of groupthink

Whatever the cause of groupthink, you need to guard against it in your team—and take active steps to discourage it. Your first move? Know the symptoms of groupthink:

- An illusion of invulnerability prevails in the team.
- Members protect or insulate the team leader from contradictory evidence.
- People accept data confirming their view and reject data that opposes it.
- Members neglect to consider alternatives when making decisions.
- People discount or even demonize individuals whose views are out of step with those of the majority.

If you see any of these things happening in *your* team, take action to combat groupthink.

## Key Idea: Combat groupthink

### Key Idea

The best antidote to groupthink is a diversity of thoughtful ideas. To welcome such ideas into your team, consider these practices:

- **Issue early cautions about groupthink.** As you form your team and launch the team project, caution members about the nature and dangers of groupthink. Explain that as the team becomes more close-knit, the risk of groupthink will rise. Invite people to offer ideas for preventing groupthink. Distribute a list of the symptoms of groupthink, and ask members to watch for them as the team moves forward in its work.
- **Seek objectivity.** Empower a few individuals on your team who are smart and well-regarded to objectively represent dissenting ideas and data. Have this special team examine and report back on every one of the team's key assumptions.
- **Bring in a "devil's advocate."** Appoint a respected and qualified team member to the role of devil's advocate. Charge this person with challenging the assumptions and conclusions of the majority.

Groupthink stifles innovation and accurate analysis. How can you fight it while maintaining a tight-knit team?

## Activity: Assessing groupthink

This assessment helps you evaluate how well you are helping your team resist groupthink.

This assessment can help you evaluate how well you are using strategies to ensure that your team resists groupthink.

Do you and the members of your team know the symptoms of groupthink?

☐ Yes

Knowing the symptoms of groupthink—including an unwillingness to raise objections or concerns about a project—is an important first step to combating groupthink.

☐ No

Knowing the symptoms of groupthink—including an unwillingness to raise objections or concerns about a project—is an important first step to combating groupthink.

Have you issued early cautions to your team about the nature and dangers of groupthink?

☐ Yes

If you issue early cautions about groupthink, your team will know to look for its warning signs.

☐ No

If you issue early cautions about groupthink, your team will know to look for its warning signs.

Have you established a process for detecting symptoms of groupthink in your team?

☐ Yes

Detecting groupthink while maintaining a close team bond is not easy. You need to put a process in place to detect it.

☐ No

Detecting groupthink while maintaining a close team bond is not easy. You need to put a process in place to detect it.

Have you empowered a few people on your team to objectively represent dissenting ideas and data?

☐ Yes

A conscious effort to represent dissenting ideas and data will help you maintain objectivity.

☐ No

A conscious effort to represent dissenting ideas and data will help you maintain objectivity.

Have you taken steps to ensure that dissent is tolerated and protected, and that dissenters have the freedom to voice contrary views?

☐ Yes

If dissenters are punished or ignored, they will lapse into silence, thereby making groupthink more likely.

☐ No

If dissenters are punished or ignored, they will lapse into silence, thereby making groupthink more likely.

Have you appointed a devil's advocate to challenge all assumptions associated with the group's favored options?

☐ Yes

A devil's advocate will put every option under scrutiny, challenging groupthink at each step of the process.

☐ No

A devil's advocate will put every option under scrutiny, challenging groupthink at each step of the process.

Do people seem to feel confident expressing dissenting views?

☐ Yes

If dissenters are uncomfortable, they may be silent, thereby making groupthink more likely.

☐ No

If dissenters are uncomfortable, they may be silent, thereby making groupthink more likely.

Do team members feel comfortable hearing others express dissenting views?

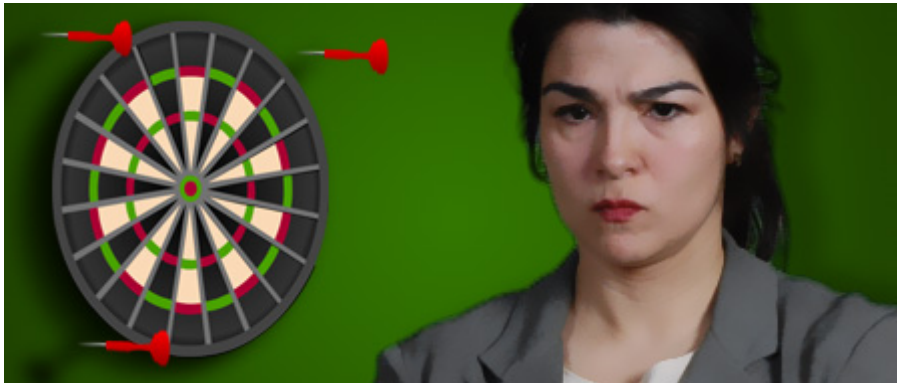
☐ Yes

Team members should be encouraged to hear dissenting views as a healthy challenge to groupthink—not as a personal attack.

☐ No

Team members should be encouraged to hear dissenting views as a healthy challenge to groupthink—not as a personal attack.

## Recognize the signs of ineffective leadership



How can you discern if you or another team leader is providing less-than-stellar leadership? Look for these symptoms:

- Team member participation is low—people aren't contributing ideas and opinions during meetings and decision-making sessions.
- People are unable to explain why the team's work or project is important to the company and how it will benefit the organization.
- The team leader is taking on more projects and responsibilities than the team members are.
- Team members feel that their leader is representing only one of many constituencies; for example, that he or she is favoring members with technical expertise over those with other skills or backgrounds.

## Understand the roots of leadership problems

“ You get the best out of others when you give the best of yourself. ”  
—Harry Firestone

What causes a team leader to be ineffective? In some cases, a novice team leader who is also an individual contributor at his or her company may have difficulty transitioning into the team leader role. Individual contributors are used to handling work themselves rather than managing the work of others. If they find it hard to delegate, they prevent their team from leveraging the skills and expertise of all its members.

Team leadership problems may stem from several other tendencies as well:

- **"I'm the boss."** Since many team leaders are managers, they may continue to act like traditional bosses while leading their teams. In their view, "leaders tell their teams what to do and how to do it." But team members need some degree of autonomy if the team as a whole to succeed.
- **"I've empowered my team."** Some team leaders erroneously believe that they have "empowered" their team and therefore can take a hands-off approach. This doesn't work either, because teams also need some degree of guidance.

## Balance bossing with empowering

Experts agree that team leaders must maintain a *balance* between being a boss and empowering team members. How does this balancing act work in practice? Consider these points:

- Leaders have to spell out the team's objectives to enable members to focus on their goals and make any needed mid-course corrections as they work toward achieving those goals.

But at the same time, leaders must give team members decision-making authority over *how* to achieve the objectives. Team members can act as a team only if they have real authority and a sense of mutual accountability and ownership of their work.

- If you're leading a team and you see symptoms of poor leadership, take an honest look at yourself. Ask whether you're being too much of a boss, or taking too much of a hands-off approach to your team. Consider getting some coaching to identify ways to correct the boss/empowerment balance in your leadership style. Or ask the team sponsor for his or her guidance.

Tapping into senior management's vision can also help. Keep company leadership apprised of your team's progress to ensure that the team is moving in a direction consistent with the larger vision. Communicate frequently with senior leadership to see if there have been any changes to company-level strategies or goals that your team needs to know about. And ask senior management for help if you need it.

For example, if corporate strategy has changed and your team needs additional skills to help carry out the strategy, seek approval for any needed training.

## Activity: Recognizing the signs of ineffective leadership

Ineffective leadership can get a team off target very quickly. Show that you can spot the signs of ineffective leadership.

Sara is a project manager at your firm, KPT Design. KPT Design creates trade-show exhibits for clients. You are Sara's management coach, and are responsible for identifying possible flaws in how she leads her team. You've observed several of Sara's team meetings, watching for possible signs of ineffective leadership. You've taken notes during these meetings. Now you must review them and decide if Sara exhibited signs of ineffective leadership and, if so, what they were.

Meeting to discuss design concept for Tangerine Computers' newest product offering, a tiny mp3 device called the "mixer." Ed suggests that the exhibit design should consist of a huge walk-in tangerine model that houses a comfortable listening lounge in which listeners can try the new product. Sara sits back in her chair, watching the proceedings. Nava voices concerns about differentiating the exhibit from that of Tangerine's chief competitor, who (she guesses) will also feature a listening lounge. She favors individual booths. When asked her opinion, Sara chuckles and mentions that, as members of the creative team, Ed and Nava are the experts—but whatever decision they make must fit within the timeline proposed by Kyle, the exhibit fabricator. Ed and Nava continue to debate the merits of the booths versus the lounge. The meeting ends late.

Which signs of ineffective leadership, if any, did Sara display in this meeting?

- ☐ "Bossing" too much and not delegating

**Not the best choice.** Sara didn't boss enough in this meeting. True, team members need some degree of autonomy if the team as a whole is to succeed, but leaders have to spell out the team's objectives to enable members to focus on and work toward their goals. Sara also should have guided more of the decision-making in this meeting.

- ☐ Taking too much of a "hands off" approach and representing only a few of many constituencies of a team.

**Correct choice.** Sara was too uninvolved in this meeting. Teams do need some degree of guidance, and leaders have to spell out the team's objectives to enable members to focus on and work toward their goals. She also overemphasized the fabricator's needs and priorities during this meeting. To be productive, team members need to feel fairly represented by their leader.

- ☐ None of these

**Not the best choice.** "Taking too much of a "hands off" approach and representing only a few of many constituencies of a team" is the correct choice.

Sara is conducting a late-night workshop with her team to complete the trade-show exhibit. She notices that the team is discouraged because many elements are still not done. She decides to take action and asks the team members to take turns telling her what tasks are left outstanding. She writes each on the whiteboard and assigns a member to each task. She sets deadlines for each task and asks for a commitment from each member to complete the tasks assigned to them. A couple of team members seemed surprised at her change in approach.

Which signs of ineffective leadership, if any, did Sara display in this meeting?

- ☐ "Bossing" too much and not delegating

**Not the best choice.** Leaders must maintain a balance between being a boss and empowering team members. Because the team had reached a point of frustration and was running out of time, Sara became more directive. She had previously empowered the team to make design decisions, but rightfully switched into being a boss in order to help the team achieve their objectives. By the end of the meeting, Sara had effectively delegated all remaining tasks, set deadlines, and gained commitments from each member.

- ☐ Taking too much of a "hands off" approach and representing only a few of many constituencies of a team

**Not the best choice.** Sara actually became highly involved in this meeting in order to help her struggling team to meet their objectives. During this meeting, Sara needed to use a more directive approach and focus less on addressing each constituent's concerns. The success of the project was in jeopardy, and Sara acted appropriately.

- ☐ None of these

**Correct choice.** Sara displayed highly effective leadership throughout the meeting.

The project has concluded, and Sara is conducting a meeting to debrief the team on the project. Nava tells the group that while she's very proud of the tradeshow's outcome, she wishes the team had created a better project plan earlier so as to avoid the time crunch at the end. Ed agrees and adds that the team might re-evaluate how they staffed the tradeshow booth. He offers to create a staffing plan for next quarter's show.

Sara knows that the team is tired from the recent event and is behind on other projects. To relieve the group of some work, she decides that she will create the project plan and staffing plan for the next show. That way, she can save the team time next quarter by already having their roles defined and assigned.

Which signs of ineffective leadership, if any, did Sara display in this meeting?

- ☐ "Bossing" too much and not delegating

**Correct choice.** Sara is taking a very directive approach in order to help the team avoid another time-wasting situation. However, she is doing her team a disservice. The team needs to learn from their past errors and could better do so if Sara empowers them to make changes based on the lessons they have learned from this project. To empower the team, Sara should delegate the post-project analysis to various team members. This encourages each member to take ownership for improving processes and prepares them to become leaders themselves.

- ☐ Taking too much of a "hands off" approach and representing only a few of many constituencies of a team

**Not the best choice.** Quite the opposite. Sara is becoming too involved in the debrief process. She's depriving her team of the opportunity to learn from their mistakes. In this case, Sara's team would be better served if she allowed the different constituencies to represent themselves. That way, they could learn more from the debrief process.

- ☐ None of these

**Not the best choice.** "Bossing too much and not delegating" is the correct choice.

## Address leadership problems when you're not the leader

What if you're a member of a team led by someone else, and you suspect that the leader is the source of team problems? This situation raises some delicate challenges. But there *are* several steps you can take to address the problem. Consider these guidelines:

- **Meet with the team leader to discuss perceived deficiencies.** Follow productive communication guidelines by using "I" language and describing the impact that the leader's behavior is having on the team.

For example, "I noticed that only two people offered ideas during the last meeting. I think we may not be exploring enough alternatives, and I'm worried that the team won't make the best decision. Is there something we could do to solicit contributions from more team members?"



- **Volunteer to share the workload.** By volunteering, you may boost your chances of encouraging your team's leader to delegate more. Delegating is essential for any team, because it enables the leader to leverage the blend of skills, experience, and ideas that the team's members bring to the work.
- **Consult with the team sponsor.** If you've concluded that a leadership problem is unresolvable through direct communication with your team's leader, bring the problem to the team sponsor—the manager or executive who has a stake in the outcome of the project and is accountable for the team's performance—and get his or her opinions about next steps.

Team leaders have a complex set of responsibilities to fulfill, so it's not surprising that they frequently face difficulties. The best leaders, however, know when it's time to reassess their skills or adjust their approach. And the best team members know when and how to help their leader stay on the right track.

## Overview

This section provides interactive exercises so you can practice what you've learned. These exercises are self-checks only; your answers will not be used to evaluate your performance in the topic.

### Scenario

Assume the role of a manager in a fictional situation and explore different outcomes based on your choices (5-10 minutes).

### Check Your Knowledge

Assess your understanding of key points by completing a 10-question quiz (10 minutes).

## Scenario: Part 1

### Part 1

Miguel heads the benefits administration group within MaxGlobal's Human Resources department. Some months ago, his team was tasked with a challenging project: evaluating potential new benefits programs, then selecting and implementing the most promising one.

The team has made major strides on the project. However, it has also encountered some significant challenges that have created tension among team members. At several recent meetings, the discussion has taken an awkward, negative turn. In Miguel's view, members aren't "talking like a team" as much as they used to. He's concerned that if the tension increases, it will destroy the group's morale and productivity. He thinks about how he might improve the way team members communicate.

What might Miguel do to improve team communication?

- **Encourage all meeting participants to contribute by asking their opinions**

**Good choice.**

By voicing what they think of a proposal or idea, team members stay involved in the team's conversational process. Miguel can further encourage participation by stopping the free flow of conversation occasionally, going around the table, and inviting the team members, one by one, to "add their two cents." People will feel more involved, as well as benefit from one another's opinions.

- Start meetings by sharing new information that can serve as additional conversational "fodder"

#### **Not the best choice.**

Sharing more information—especially details that could have been distributed to everyone before the meeting—only wastes valuable meeting time. Instead, everyone should stay focused on solving problems during meetings. By distributing detailed information a day or so before the meeting Miguel can help the group maintain this focus.

- Assign a team member to act as "devil's advocate" on all major debates

#### **Good choice.**

A devil's advocate—someone who challenges the prevailing point of view—can stimulate members to reexamine their perspectives. This process encourages a group to deliberately explore opposing points of view. It also helps the team avoid "groupthink," which happens when everyone adopts the prevailing opinion without questioning whether it's really the best one.

## Scenario: Part 2

### **Part 2**

Miguel's efforts have paid off—his team has revived its ability to engage in open, spirited debate during meetings. But the resulting intensity of some of the discussions has caught Miguel off guard. He finds himself feeling increasingly uncomfortable with the heated exchanges between members that sometimes erupt during meetings. Miguel doesn't want to contribute to or intensify the heat. He's uncertain what approach to take.

What approach might Miguel take in response to the heated exchanges?

- Encourage members to take the "hot issues" off-line and debate them between meetings

#### **Not the best choice.**

Even if team members engage in what seem like personal attacks, Miguel should address the tension directly during the meeting. Whenever one or more members believe that a problem exists within the team, the group should discuss it, even if the other members don't consider the issue important. This process takes time, but it's well worth it.

- [Decide on the most appropriate conflict-resolution technique and apply it at the next meeting](#)

#### **Not the best choice.**

Deciding on and applying a conflict resolution technique himself won't help team members learn to improve their team process. Rather, Miguel should encourage negotiation and compromise between team members who disagree. One way to do this is to help members find some common ground or new possibilities. Even if the end result is that the members agree to disagree, the team will have experienced an example of effective conflict resolution.

- [Suggest that team members become better listeners](#)

#### **Correct choice.**

Active listening is a major component of conflict resolution. Additional active listening techniques include: Asking questions that encourage a speaker to expand on his or her points; referring to points made earlier by a speaker and building on those ideas; and discouraging negative body language (such as doodling or looking off into the distance) that may suggest a lack of interest in the speaker.

## **Scenario: Part 3**

### **Part 3**

Miguel's efforts to encourage active listening among his team members have been successful. The group has improved its ability to handle disagreements and interpersonal tensions productively, and has taken further steps toward its project goal.

But on several occasions, some members have failed to complete their assignments. A few others have missed weekly meetings or have been unusually quiet during meetings. Miguel is worried that team participation is flagging and considers ways to foster better participation.

What might Miguel do to encourage better team participation?

- [Assess the fit between team members and their task assignments](#)

**Correct choice.**

In some cases, low participation stems from a poor fit between team members' skills and the tasks they've been assigned or have agreed to take on. Team leaders should identify what's causing the poor fit and take steps to address it—for example, shift tasks to team members who have the more appropriate skills.

- Acknowledge that team members have heavy workloads, and consider revising expectations about participation

**Not the best choice.**

It's better to first revisit the norms for team participation that everyone has agreed to—such as "We will attend all team meetings and arrive at meetings on time." Ask whether members still agree on the rules. If so, reiterate the importance of following the rules. If members believe the norms should be changed, discuss the pros and cons of new rules about participation. Of course, if participation norms aren't currently in place, create some immediately.

- Conclude that team members have been distracted or exhausted by too much work, and find ways to ease the burden

**Not the best choice.**

It's better to first ask team members to explain the reasons for their declining participation in the team. Leaders can then use those responses to generate ideas for solving the problem. Without asking, leaders risk proposing actions that have little relevance for the problem at hand.

## Scenario: Conclusion

**Conclusion**

Miguel has helped his team overcome three major obstacles to progress: communication blockages within the group, interpersonal conflict, and low participation on the part of several team members.

Facilitated by his leadership, the group has excelled not only in its measurable results but—equally important—in the way in which it achieved those outcomes.

## Activity: Check Your Knowledge: Question 1

During your weekly team meeting, a heated debate emerges over a particular project your team is working on. You notice that not everyone seems to be participating in the debate. What might you do?

- Stop the free flow of conversation and ask if anyone else wants to contribute or is feeling left out

**Not the best choice.**

Asking if anyone else wants to contribute may not be enough to encourage team members who are hesitant about providing their input. To prompt everyone to contribute, you should stop the conversation and go around the table to give each person a turn to talk—perhaps by asking his or her opinion. This technique is valuable even during a heated debate, since the team will benefit from knowing each member's opinion on the issue at hand.

- Stop the conversation, then go around the table and give each person a turn to talk

**Correct choice.**

Some team members may hesitate to interrupt a debate to add their input. When you structure time for everyone to participate, the team benefits by hearing each member's opinion in the issue at hand.

- After the meeting, poll the team members to see if anyone was hesitant to speak up

**Not the best choice.**

It's important to encourage all members to contribute during the meeting itself, rather than waiting until after the meeting to find out if anyone was hesitant to speak up. Therefore, you should stop the conversation, go around the table, and give each person a turn to talk—perhaps by asking his or her opinions. This technique is valuable even during a heated debate, since the team will benefit from knowing each member's opinion on the issue at hand.

## Check Your Knowledge: Question 2

Your team members disagree about how best to carry out a particular task. What should you do to handle the disagreement?

- Provide a resolution yourself, such as declaring the right way to carry out the task

**Not the best choice.**

When team members experience conflict, you should avoid dictating a resolution, because people may resent being bullied into accepting a solution. Instead, encourage them to find common ground and explore new possibilities. In this case, you might say, "You both want the same result here—a task finished correctly. But you're recommending different ways to get there. Let's discuss the pros and cons of the two different approaches you're arguing over, as well as bring some additional alternatives into the picture. That way, we'll stand a better chance of selecting the best solution."

- Encourage team members to find common ground and explore new possibilities

**Correct choice.**

When team members experience conflict, you should encourage them to find common ground and explore new possibilities. In this case, you might say, "You both want the same result here—a task finished correctly. But you're recommending different ways to get there. Let's discuss the pros and cons of the two different approaches you're arguing over, as well as bring some additional alternatives into the picture. That way, we'll stand a better chance of selecting the best solution."

- **Let the most persuasive team member determine the outcome of the conflict**

**Not the best choice.**

When team members experience conflict and one member bullies the rest of the team into accepting his or her viewpoint, the rest of the members will resent that person and not support the decision. Instead, encourage them to find common ground and explore new possibilities. In this case, you might say, "You both want the same result here—a task finished correctly. But you're recommending different ways to get there. Let's discuss the pros and cons of the two different approaches you're arguing over, as well as bring some additional alternatives into the picture. That way, we'll stand a better chance of selecting the best solution."

## Check Your Knowledge: Question 3

You want to encourage active listening during an intense discussion about a conflict within your team. What action might you take?

- **Encourage team members to refer back to points their colleagues made earlier, and to build on those points**

**Correct choice.**

Referring back to and building on points made earlier is one effective practice for active listening. Others include controlling behavior that suggests a lack of interest (such as fidgeting), expanding questions that encourage a speaker to expand on his or her ideas, and inviting speakers to explain the reasons behind their opinions. Active listening enables people with different perspectives and skills to voice their opinions—which the team needs to make the best decisions.

- **Let people know that it's okay to interrupt each other if they need to vent strong emotions**

**Not the best choice.**

Though holding in angry feelings leads to resentment, you need to encourage people to share their frustrations in a constructive way—which means waiting until another person has finished speaking, rather than interrupting. The correct answer is "Encourage team members to refer back to points their colleagues made earlier, and to build on those points." This is just one effective practice for active listening. Others include controlling behavior that suggests a lack of interest (such as fidgeting), expanding questions that encourage a speaker to expand on his or her ideas, and inviting speakers to explain the reasons behind their opinions. Active listening enables people with different perspectives and skills to voice their opinions—which the team needs to make the best decisions.

- Encourage people to restate the reasons behind their opinions if other team members express confusion or frustration

**Not the best choice.**

Restating opinions is not a form of active listening; it's a form of advocating. Instead, active listening entails referring back to points that colleagues made earlier and building on those points. But this is just one effective practice for active listening. Others include controlling behavior that suggests a lack of interest (such as fidgeting), expanding questions that encourage a speaker to expand on his or her ideas, and inviting speakers to explain the reasons behind their opinions. Active listening enables people with different perspectives and skills to voice their opinions—which the team needs to make the best decisions.

## Check Your Knowledge: Question 4

Your team is evaluating ideas generated during a brainstorming session and ruling out unlikely proposed solutions to a problem. Which kind of thinking is the team engaging in?

- Divergent thinking

**Not the best choice.**

The team is actually engaging in convergent thinking, not divergent thinking. During convergent thinking, a team assesses the value of all the ideas generated during divergent thinking to determine which are worth pursuing, given resource constraints and other realities that must be considered. During divergent thinking, team members ask questions that haven't been asked before, analyze problems and situations from different perspectives, and make new connections among facts and events. Helping your team move from divergent to convergent thinking is a good way to promote creativity.

- Convergent thinking

**Correct choice.**

During convergent thinking, a team assesses the value of all the ideas generated during divergent thinking to determine which are worth pursuing, given resource constraints and other realities that must be considered. Helping your team move from divergent to convergent thinking is a good way to promote creativity.

## Check Your Knowledge: Question 5

Your team is having trouble making a difficult decision. Discussions are going around in circles, and people are rigidly adhering to their positions. Which of the following is the best course of action for you to take?

- Ask for a vote, then make the decision based on majority rule

**Not the best choice.**

It's best not to impose a decision-making method on the team, since you and the team probably agreed on a method earlier. If you think the group needs to change its decision-making approach, the change should be made as a team.

- Look for smaller areas of agreement on which to build larger decisions

**Correct choice.**

By breaking the decision into smaller pieces that members can agree on, you may make it easier for members to agree on the larger decision. For example, suppose the team is trying to select one of three product designs and can't seem to come to agreement. Focus members' attention on smaller aspects of the decision—for instance, by asking: "What are the most important features that the new product needs to have?" If members can agree on the answer to that question, they may find it easier to agree on the selection of the product design.

- Don't let people get distracted by worrying about the consequences of failing to make a decision

**Not the best choice.**

Actually, you *should* remind people of the damage that decision-making problems can cause. Doing so can motivate them to improve their process. Consequences of unproductive decision making include lost time, poor choices, decisions that many team members won't support, erosion of team morale, wasted energy, and diverting of the team's attention away from important goals.

## Check Your Knowledge: Question 6

You've assigned Joe, an employee, to lead a team charged with managing a special project. But you've begun noticing signs that Joe is not leading his team effectively. Which of the following is *not* likely a sign of ineffective leadership on Joe's part?

- Members of Joe's team aren't contributing ideas and opinions during meetings and decision-making sessions

**Not the best choice.**

This actually *is* a sign that Joe is not leading his team effectively. In a well-led team, members readily contribute their ideas and opinions during meetings and decision-making sessions—enabling the team to benefit from the diversity of contributions.

- People aren't able to explain why the project the team is working is important to the company

**Not the best choice.**

This actually *is* a sign that Joe is not leading his team effectively. In a well-led team, people are able to explain why the project the team is working is important to the company. By understanding the value their work provides, people feel more motivated to excel.

- Joe is giving as many responsibilities as possible to the people on his team



**Correct choice.**

The fact that Joe is giving as many responsibilities as possible to his team members is *not* a sign of ineffective leadership on his part—because a good leader does delegate. If Joe were taking on more tasks and responsibilities than his team members were, you could conclude that he was not leading effectively. Many new team leaders who are used to being individual contributors—doing all the work themselves—have trouble learning to delegate once they begin leading a team.

## Check Your Knowledge: Question 7

In the past few team meetings, you've felt that members were neglecting to consider enough alternatives when making decisions and were discounting individuals who expressed minority views. What condition do you suspect your team is beginning to suffer?

- [Decision-making paralysis](#)

**Not the best choice.**

The team is not suffering from decision-making paralysis, since members are in fact making decisions. Instead, it's suffering from groupthink. Groupthink occurs when members of a group think alike to the point where they become unwilling to raise objections or concerns about a project—even though those concerns are legitimate and based on hard data. Groupthink curtails critical thinking and debate, which are two essential ingredients for an effective team.

- [Limited team participation](#)

**Not the best choice.**

The team is not suffering from limited participation, since members are in fact all taking part in expressing views. Instead, it's suffering from groupthink. Groupthink occurs when members of a group think alike to the point where they become unwilling to raise objections or concerns about a project—even though those concerns are legitimate and based on hard data. Groupthink curtails critical thinking and debate, which are two essential ingredients for an effective team.

- [Groupthink](#)

**Correct choice.**

Groupthink is a condition that can occur when members of a group think alike to the point where they become unwilling to raise objections or concerns about a project—even though those concerns are legitimate and based on hard data. Groupthink curtails critical thinking and debate, which are two essential ingredients for an effective team.

## Check Your Knowledge: Question 8

Members of your team don't seem to feel mutually accountable to one another for the team's objectives, and they're not collaborating or sharing information as much as you think they should.

Which of the following actions might you take to strengthen team identity?

- Avoid integrating newcomers, since the presence of strangers can increase awkwardness in the team

**Not the best choice.**

In many teams, newcomers must be added after the team's work has begun. If you need to add newcomers, you can strengthen team identity by engaging them quickly in team projects—so they feel welcome and involved, and so the other team members can immediately appreciate their contributions.

- Publicly acknowledge the value of differences among team members, and explain how those differences serve the team's goal

**Correct choice.**

By emphasizing how differences within the team serve the team's common goal, you can help strengthen team identity. Additional strategies for enhancing team identity include implanting a sense of urgency, encouraging collaborative work, and quickly integrating newcomers in team projects so they feel welcome and integrated.

- Avoid implanting any sense of urgency, so team members can instead focus on forging the bonds necessary for team identity

**Not the best choice.**

Implanting a sense of urgency actually is a good way to strengthen team identity, because when team members feel that their work is crucial, they try harder to reach goals and they feel compelled to join together to meet the challenge at hand. The correct answer is "Publicly acknowledge the value of differences among team members, and explain how those differences serve the team's goal." This strategy can greatly strengthen team identity. Additional strategies include engaging newcomers in team projects so that they feel welcome and integrated into the group and creating opportunities for members to get to know each other.

## Check Your Knowledge: Question 9

You're a member of a team led by someone else, and you believe that the team leader isn't delegating enough. What might you do?

- Point out to the team leader that he or she is acting too much like a traditional boss

**Not the best choice.**

This action may cause the team leader to become defensive. Instead of pointing out that he or she is acting too much like a traditional boss, you should volunteer to share the team's workload. By volunteering to share the workload, you can boost your chances of encouraging the team leader to delegate more. Delegating is essential for any team, because it enables the leader to leverage members' diverse skills, experience, and knowledge.

- Bring in an outside facilitator to advocate the benefits of delegation for the leader

**Not the best choice.**

As a member of the team, you may not have the authority to bring in an outside facilitator to advocate the benefits of delegation for the leader. Instead, you should volunteer to share the team's workload. By volunteering to share the workload, you can boost your chances of encouraging the team leader to delegate more. Delegating is essential for any team, because it enables the leader to leverage members' diverse skills, experience, and knowledge.

- Volunteer to share the team's workload

**Correct choice.**

Delegating is essential for any team, because it enables the leader to leverage members' diverse skills, experience, and knowledge. By volunteering to share the workload, you can boost your chances of encouraging the team leader to delegate more.

## Check Your Knowledge: Question 10

You've spotted signs of groupthink in your team. Which of the following actions might you take to combat this dangerous tendency?

- Explain that groupthink can seriously damage a team's ability to come to agreement on important issues

**Not the best choice.**

Actually, one danger of groupthink is that it *causes* team members to come to agreement prematurely—by discounting minority views. Instead of explaining that groupthink can seriously damage a team's ability to agree, you would want to appoint a team member to challenge the assumptions and conclusions of the majority. By bringing in a "devil's advocate," you help ensure that dissenting views are represented in the team and force majority members to deal with facts and ideas that conflict with their own. Providing a devil's advocate is a powerful antidote to groupthink.

- Empower several team members to provide objective evidence supporting the majority's opinions

**Not the best choice.**

Actually, one danger of groupthink is that team members listen *only* to majority opinions in arriving at agreement. Instead of empowering members to provide objective evidence supporting the majority's views, you would want to appoint a team member to challenge the assumptions and conclusions of the majority. By bringing in a "devil's advocate," you help ensure that dissenting views are represented in the team and force majority members to deal with facts and ideas that conflict with their own. Providing a devil's advocate is a powerful antidote to groupthink.

- Appoint a team member to challenge the assumptions and conclusions of the majority

**Correct choice.**

By bringing in a "devil's advocate," you help ensure that dissenting views are represented in the team and force majority members to deal with facts and ideas that conflict with their own. Providing a devil's advocate is a powerful antidote to groupthink.

## Check Your Knowledge: Results

# Your score:

## Steps for keeping team meetings on the right track

1. **Follow a predetermined agenda that's been distributed to participants ahead of time.** If each participant knows ahead of time what will be discussed, everyone will be more likely to stick to the topics at hand.
2. **Open the meeting by stating its purpose and objectives.** Explain how the meeting's purpose relates to the team's overall goals and what you hope to accomplish through the meeting.
3. **Let everyone have a say.**

All opinions, suggestions, and constructive criticism need to be welcome. Show support for the expression of views with which you may disagree. Tell members that they will not be censured for an unpopular opinion, as long as they're trying to accomplish the team's goals. Try to encourage others to explore such opinions instead of dismissing them out of hand.

4. **Gain closure on each issue.** Using the decision-making method team members have agreed to (majority rule, consensus, small group, or leader with input), ensure that each issue up for decision is resolved during the meeting.
5. **Leave time at the end of each meeting for new business or unscheduled items.** By carving out time for new business or unscheduled items at the end of the meeting, you help participants stay focused on the agenda during the early part of the meeting.
6. **End the meeting with an action and communication plan.**

A good action and communication plan specifies:

- What got decided at the meeting and what tasks need to be done as a result of the meeting
  - Who has responsibility for those tasks
  - When the tasks must be completed
7. **Distribute the plan.** Send the action and communication plan out to all meeting participants and to people who weren't at the meeting but need to be informed of the outcome.

## Steps for resolving conflicts

1. **Diagnose the root cause of the conflict.**

Listen to what the parties are saying. Is the cause a particular behavior, a clash of personalities, or a situation? What seems to be really at stake for the members in conflict?

2. **Negotiate a resolution.**

- Find the right tone and setting for conflict resolution. Don't take sides—*moderate* the discussion. Consider scripting what you plan to say, and anticipating how others will respond.
- Work with the disagreeing parties or the entire team to identify and evaluate alternative solutions to the problem. Encourage people to find common ground and explore new possibilities.

### 3. Encourage active listening.

- Allow the disagreeing parties to voice their feelings, and ask questions about why they feel as they do.
- Encourage members to manage their emotions and to talk rationally about what can be done to solve the problem.
- Ask people to behave in ways that demonstrate interest in what others are saying.

For example, avoid doodling, fidgeting, and interrupting while others are speaking.

Model active listening behaviors, such as asking questions that encourage speakers to expand on their points, or referring back to points made earlier and building on those ideas.

### 4. Remind team members to forgive.

Encourage forgiveness by practicing forgiveness yourself. Don't hold a grudge. Don't harbor ill will after a conflict has been resolved. And remember to apologize when you've done something wrong.

## Steps for evaluating your team

### 1. Measure more than just goals—assess group processes as well.

Members are juggling many tasks to reach the team's goals. *How* you achieve those goals can be just as important as the end result, especially if the team must work together on an ongoing basis.

- Observe how the team communicates, how it deals with adversity, how it resolves conflicts, and what other methods it uses to reach its goals.
- Select from several methods for assessing the quality of your team's processes—such as benchmarking (comparing the team's process to that of other, similar teams in the company), outside observation (having an external consultant objectively evaluate the team's processes), ongoing team discussions about process, and project debriefing sessions (identifying what went well and what didn't during completion of a task).
- Also, be sure to solicit outside opinions—for example, customer satisfaction surveys may provide useful insight into how well a team is functioning.

### 2. Identify problems or obstacles that stand in the way of team progress.

- For example, does the team lack a sense of identity (as evidenced by poor collaboration, information sharing, and joint decision making)? Are members getting embroiled in interpersonal conflicts? Is team participation low and creative thinking lacking?
- Whatever the problems or obstacles are, you need to pinpoint them before you can address them.

### 3. Set up evaluation milestones.

- Make sure you provide feedback at regular intervals throughout the project. This can help you correct problems as soon as you diagnose them.

- A debriefing session after a project is completed can help your team take stock of what went well and what didn't, and identify lessons to apply to future projects.

#### 4. Help team members evaluate each other.

The most constructive criticism will come from other team members, because they are most familiar with each other's work. But proceed gently here: Some team members may feel uncomfortable evaluating their peers.

- To get started, try having everyone share his or her opinion of how effective the team has been and what it needs to do to improve.
- If there is a general consensus about these issues, move on to feedback about individual members—have each person begin with a self-assessment.
- Be prepared to handle conflict, anger, or hurt feelings when members start evaluating each other.

#### 5. Evaluate yourself and your leadership skills.

- Watch for signs of poor leadership in your team—such as low participation, an inability among team members to state why the team's work is important; or a tendency for you to take on more projects and responsibilities than team members are taking on.
- If you see these symptoms, ask yourself whether you're trying to be too much of a traditional boss (telling your team what to do and how to do it) or whether you're taking too much of a hands-off approach (because you believe you've empowered your team).
- Look for ways to balance "bossing" with "empowering," such as spelling out the team's objectives but then letting members decide *how* to reach those objectives.

### Tips for building team performance

- Establish an urgent and worthwhile purpose and a clear direction.
- Select team members on the basis of their knowledge, experience, skills, and attitude—not their personalities.
- Ensure that roles and responsibilities are clear.
- Be alert to what happens in the first few team meetings, including actions taken.
- Set clear rules of behavior.
- Establish immediate performance-oriented tasks and goals.
- Seek out team members' opinions and ideas—and use them.
- Encourage members to talk often about the team's goals.
- Keep providing new facts and information to create challenge.
- Use positive feedback, recognition, and rewards to encourage team members.
- Cultivate an atmosphere in which everyone feels recognized and comfortable making contributions.

### Tips for improving team communication

- Use pronouns—such as "we," "us," and "our"—when referring to your team.
- Actively solicit all team members' views.
- Use meeting time wisely; for example, by distributing required informational materials well ahead of a meeting, you can focus meeting time on problem solving, not information sharing.
- Use questions to open space for dialogue.

For example, "Can you tell me what makes this issue important to you?", "What are your reservations or concerns?", or "Let's stop for a minute and revisit our objectives (or

examine our process)."

- Seek clarification by asking, "I don't understand. Could you explain what you're saying in another way?"
- Don't interrupt team members who have less power than others in the organization.
- Consider using an outside facilitator to diagnose and address communication problems.

## Tips for making the most of conflict

- Encourage team members to listen to one another and consider different viewpoints—perhaps by inviting two people to switch positions and argue for the side they previously opposed.
- Suggest that team members objectively question one another's assumptions.
- Make it clear that you *want* contentious issues aired, and that *anyone* can point out an issue without retribution.
- Even if only one person thinks there's a problem that needs discussing, acknowledge the issue that he or she has raised.
- Remind people of the norms the team has agreed on for how members treat each other.
- Encourage members who raise concerns to describe the issue as specifically as possible.
- Keep the discussion impersonal by discussing *what* is impeding progress, not who is "to blame."
- If the issue involves a team member's behavior, encourage the person who identified the problem to explain how the behavior affects him or her, rather than making assumptions about what's motivating the behavior.
- End the discussion with concrete suggestions for improvement, if not a solution to the problem.
- If the conversation ends up going nowhere because the subject at hand is too sensitive, consider adjourning the discussion until a specified later date so that people can cool down.
- Consider bringing in a facilitator for especially heated conversations.

## Tips for balancing bossing with empowering

- Clarify the team's objectives, but leave it up to team members to decide how to achieve those objectives.
- Identify informal leaders within your team by assessing their behavior and the degree of deference they receive from others.
- Ensure that informal leaders understand the team's goals, know why those goals are important, and accept those goals as their own.
- Cultivate positive relationships with informal leaders in your team, and use those relationships to communicate the big picture to others.
- Encourage team members to share and rotate leadership among themselves.

For example, give people ample opportunities to head up ad hoc task forces, arrange off-site meetings, and so on.

- Hold team members accountable for results and quality of team processes.
- Display passionate commitment to the team's mission to encourage the same among team members.
- Consider getting coaching to identify ways to improve the boss/empowerment balance. Or ask the team sponsor for his or her guidance.



- Keep company leadership apprised of your team's progress, to ensure that the team is moving in a direction consistent with the larger corporate vision.
- If you're not the team leader, help the leader stay on the right track.

For example, meet with him or her to discuss perceived leadership problems and volunteer to share the workload if the leader has failed to delegate sufficiently.

## Team audit—how are we doing?

Team Audit - How Are We Doing?						
<p>Use this audit periodically to gather data from each team member to create a group profile the team can use as a focal point for a discussion about, "How well are we doing as a team?" The discussion provides an opportunity to compare points of view objectively and, if need be, to get back on track and move forward more productively.</p> <p>Each team member can complete the audit. Individual responses should be kept confidential. Compile the individual responses into a group profile for the team to share in a team meeting.</p>						
Team Name:			Date:			
Team Goals/Team Purpose:						
Rate your opinion of the team's effectiveness on the dimensions listed below, with "1" representing an ineffective area in need of improvement to "5" representing an area of effectiveness and strength.						
Aspect/ Dimension	Rating: 1 (ineffective) to 5 (effective and strong)					Comments/ Example
	1	2	3	4	5	
Achieving our goals/purpose						
Improving our process						
Fostering a sense of team identity						
Making decisions						
Communicating						
Resolving conflicts						
Participating in the team						
Generating creative ideas and solutions						
Combating groupthink						
Ensuring effective team leadership						
Comments:						
The biggest challenge we face as a team is:						
Our greatest strength as a team is:						
The one thing I would most like to see the team do is:						

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## Team identity assessment



<i>Team Identity Assessment</i>		
<i>Evaluate how well you are helping your team gain a sense of team identity.</i>		
Questions	Yes	No
1. Do you use inclusive pronouns, such as "we," "us," and "our," to underscore that the work being done is a team effort?		
2. During meetings, do you refer often to team goals?		
3. When team members disagree, do you ask probing questions to get more information?		
4. Do you encourage collaborative work among your team members?		
5. Do you organize social events to enable team members get to know one another?		
6. Do you implant a sense of urgency to communicate that the team's work is crucial?		
7. Do you publicly acknowledge the value of differences among team members?		
8. Do you encourage members to take part in work activities they find interesting and valuable?		
9. Do you recruit team members selectively?		
10. Do you integrate newcomers by quickly engaging them in team projects?		
11. Do you recognize the skills and contributions of individual members?		
12. Do you use emblems such as T-shirts or hats to help people identify with the team and its values?		
<p><i>If you answered "yes" to most of these questions, your team in all likelihood has a strong sense of team identity. If you answered "no" to more than three of these questions, you might want to brainstorm ways to strengthen your group's team identity. If appropriate, consider asking for guidance from your supervisor, team sponsor, or colleagues. You might also consider asking the team for guidance.</i></p>		

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## Worksheet for resolving a disagreement

<i>Worksheet for Resolving a Disagreement</i>	
<i>Use this worksheet to diagnose a disagreement among members and to plan a discussion of how to "get unstuck."</i>	
Describe the disagreement.	
Diagnose the disagreement. ( <i>Who is involved in the disagreement? What's at stake for this team member?</i> )	
Team Member	What's at Stake for This Team Member?
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
What's at stake here for you?	
Plan the right setting for a discussion of the disagreement.	
Script a discussion about the disagreement. ( <i>What do you plan to say? How will others respond?</i> )	
What You Plan to Say	How Others May Respond
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
Generate alternative solutions. ( <i>Team members should have an opportunity to offer possible solutions first. Generate a dialogue to explore solutions and examine why each solution is important.</i> )	
Solution	How/Why This Solution Adds Value
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
Points to keep in mind: ( <i>i.e.: We are all on the same team. Be inventive in creating solutions that take all critical issues into account.</i> )	

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Adapted from: Jon R. Katzenbach and Douglas K. Smith, *The Wisdom of Teams*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1993.

## Groupthink assessment

<i>Groupthink Assessment</i>		
<i>Evaluate how well you are using strategies to ensure that your team resists groupthink.</i>		
Questions	Yes	No
1. Do you and the members of your team know the symptoms of groupthink?		
2. Have you issued early cautions to your team about the nature and dangers of groupthink?		
3. Have you established a process for detecting symptoms of groupthink in your team?		
4. Have you empowered a few people on your team to objectively represent dissenting ideas and data?		
5. Have you taken steps to ensure that dissent is tolerated and protected, and that dissenters have the freedom to voice contrary views?		
6. Have you appointed a devil's advocate to challenge all assumptions associated with the group's favored options?		
7. Do people seem to feel confident expressing dissenting views?		
8. Do team members feel comfortable hearing others express dissenting views?		

*If you answered "no" to any question, develop a plan for helping your team combat groupthink. Write your ideas in the space below.*

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## Why Develop Others?

"At the end of the day, you bet on people, not strategies."

Larry Bossidy

Former CEO, AlliedSignal

In today's global business environment, markets and regulations change quickly. Competitors constantly innovate. Technological changes are the norm.

In order to outmaneuver the competition and meet the demands of the moment, organizations must be agile. They must execute flawlessly. And they must transform themselves continuously.

Are your leaders ready?

Dr. Noel M. Tichy

Professor

University of Michigan Ross School of Business

We have now entered an era where I don't care what industry you're in, you need leaders who

can make decisions, make judgment calls at every single level. All the way down to the interface with the customer.

If you go to a company like Google or any of the high tech companies, a lot of the innovation that Amazon does is happening right at the front line. Go ahead, try it, put it out there, we'll learn from it. That cannot happen if the senior leadership doesn't have a commitment to both develop the leadership capability, but develop the business through engaging people at all levels of the organization.

### Becoming a teaching organization

I like to tell parents that they cannot delegate their responsibility to develop their children. And I think it is the same in an organization. Day in and day out the person that has the biggest impact on people in the organization is the next level above and the associates around and below. And so to build a learning organization I say is not enough. Learning could be, you know we are learning cooking, we are learning this or that, but teaching organizations, when I learned something, I have a responsibility to teach my colleagues.

So everybody takes responsibility for generating new knowledge and it is not enough to be a learner, you then have to translate it into teaching.

### The Virtuous Teaching Cycle

The role of a leader is to ensure that the people who work for them and around them are better every day. There's only one way to make people better. It's to teach them, learn from them, create what I call "virtuous teaching cycles", not command and control.

A virtuous teaching cycle is teach learn, teach learn. And the leader has a responsibility for reducing the hierarchy, for having a point of view to start the discussion, but then to be responsible to hear everyone's voice, get everyone involved in a disciplined way. It is not a free for all. But it is the leader's responsibility to create that virtuous teaching cycle.

A wonderful example of virtuous teaching cycle is the program that Roger Enrico ran at Pepsi, where every one of the 10 vice presidents comes with a business project.

Roger Enrico gets smarter as result of five days with 10 vice presidents, because he's learning from them. He needs to lower the hierarchy. He needs to be open to learning. And in turn, the people participating need to be energized and empowered to come up and engage in problem solving.

Another example is at Best Buy, where every morning in the stores you would bring 20 associates or so together and they would review the profit and loss statement from the day before, what we learned from the different customer segments in our stores, what we can do to improve our performance this day. And they do that every single day. The store manager was learning mostly from the associates on the floor.

That was a virtuous teaching cycle where everybody is teaching everybody, everybody is learning and the result has been an incredible result at Best Buy.

"The growth and development of people is the highest calling of leadership."

- Harvey S. Firestone

Founder, Firestone Tire and Rubber Co

There are clear advantages to leader-led development.

But for many leaders, taking on teaching, coaching, and other development responsibilities can seem daunting. You might avoid taking on these roles due to lack of time, resources, or your own lack of comfort with this role.

The following tips and resources can help you impart valuable learning to your team every day.

To develop others...

- Start with a Teachable Point of View

The first requirement of being able to develop other leaders is to have what I call a teachable point of view. I often give the example of, if I ran a tennis camp and you just came to day one of the tennis camp, I better have a teachable point of view on how I teach tennis. So you are standing there looking at me and it has got four elements. One, the ideas, well how do I teach the backhand, the forehand, the serve, rules of tennis. Then if I am a good tennis coach, I have a set of values. What are the right behaviors I want, how do I want you to dress, how do I want you to behave on the tennis court.

But if that's all I have, what do I do? Show you a power point presentation and then expect you to hit 500 backhands, 500 serves, run around for eight hours. I have to have a teachable point of view on emotional energy. How do I motivate you to buy in to the ideas and values?

On one end of the spectrum it could be I threaten you with corporal punishment, the other I can give you stock options, I can make you feel good about yourself, I can help you develop as a human being, what motivates you.

And then finally, how do I make the tough judgment calls, the yes/no, decisions as the tennis coach, the ball is in, the ball is out. I don't hire consultants and set up a committee, it is yes/no. And the same with running a business, what are the products, services, distribution channels, customer segments that are going to grow top line growth and profitability of the organization.

What are the values that I want everyone in the organization to have, how do I emotionally energize thousands of people, and then how do I make the yes/no, judgments on people and on business issues. So the fundamental building block of being able to develop other leaders is to have that teachable point of view just like the tennis coach.

To develop others...

- Lead with questions

Questions are hugely important because you want to create dialogue and again, what I call a virtuous teaching cycle where the teacher learns from the students and vice versa. Which means everybody ought to be free to ask whatever is on their mind, whatever it will take to get clarity and understanding, but it is not the leader just coming in and freeform asking questions. I believe the leader has a responsibility for framing the discussion, for having as best they can a teachable point of view, they may need help from their people in flushing it out, but they need to set the stage but then it has to be a very interactive, what I call virtuous teaching cycle environment, teach learn, teach learn, teach learn.

To develop others...

- Make it part of your routine

A good example to me of an outstanding leader developing other leaders is Myrtle Potter who at the time I am commenting was Chief Operating Officer of Genentech running the commercial side of the business. And she would take time at the end of every single meeting and do some coaching of the whole team on how we could perform as a team better, and then she would

often take individuals and say, could we spend 10 minutes over a cup of coffee, I want to give you some feedback and coaching on that report that you just presented on or how you are handling a particularly difficult human resource issue, but it was part of her regular routine. And I think the challenge for all of us as leaders is to make that a way of life and it is built into the fabric of how we lead and it is not a one off event, three times a year. It is happening almost every day.

To develop others...

- Make it a priority

One of the biggest challenges in getting people kind of on this path is to overcome some of their own resistance, either fear or the way I view the world I don't have time for this, everybody can make time. Roger Enrico is CEO of Pepsi. He didn't have time to go off for a week at a time and run training sessions. He had to readjust his calendar. So it requires you to look in the mirror and say, is this important. If it is important, of course I can make the time. Then I have to get over my own anxiety on how well I can do it, but it is a commitment to get on the path that says: this is how I am going to drive my own performance and the performance of my colleagues.

To develop others...

- Learn to teach

I think the biggest mistake is to assume you are going to be good at it right off the bat. It is like learning anything else. First time you go out and try and play tennis, good luck. But you got to stay with it and you got to engage your people in helping make you better and them better. And so it is a journey you need to get on, not I am going to do it perfectly when I start out.

If you want to be a great leader who is a great teacher, it's very simple. You have got to dive into the deep end of the pool. But you've got to dive into the pool with preparation. I don't want you drowning. I want you succeeding. It is extraordinarily rewarding for most human beings to teach others. I think once you can turn that switch on, it is self perpetuating. You get a lot of reinforcement, your team is better. You perform better because your performance goes up and it becomes this virtuous teaching cycle.

Your opportunity to develop others

We've heard why developing others can drive greater business results, and how to make the most of your leader-led development efforts. The materials provided in Develop Others enable you to create personalized learning experiences for YOUR team within the flow of their daily activities. Use the guides and projects to engage your team quickly. And to explore how key concepts apply to them in the context of their priorities and goals.

The value of teaching is the performance of the organization is totally dependent on making your people smarter and more aligned every day as the world changes. In the 21st century we are not going to get by with command and control. We are going to have to get by with knowledge creation. The way you create knowledge in an organization is you create these virtuous teaching cycles where you are teaching and learning simultaneously, responding to customer demands and changes, responding to changes in the global environment. My bottom line is if you're not teaching, you're not leading.

A leader's most important role in any organization is making good judgments — well informed, wise decisions about people, strategy and crises that produce the desired outcomes. When a leader shows consistently good judgment, little else matters. When he or she shows poor judgment nothing else matters. In addition to making their own good judgment calls, good leaders develop good judgment among their team members.

**Dr. Noel M. Tichy**

**Professor, University of Michigan Ross School of Business**

Dr. Noel M. Tichy is Professor of Management and Organizations, and Director of the Global Business Partnership at the University of Michigan Ross School of Business. The Global Business Partnership links companies and students around the world to develop and engage business leaders to incorporate global citizenship activities, both environmental projects and human capital development, for those at the bottom of the pyramid. Previously, Noel was head of General Electric's Leadership Center at Crotonville, where he led the transformation to action learning at GE. Between 1985 and 1987, he was Manager of Management Education for GE where he directed its worldwide development efforts at Crotonville. He currently consults widely in both the private and public sectors. He is a senior partner in Action Learning Associates. Noel is author of numerous books and articles, including:

For more information about Noel Tichy, visit <http://www.noeltichy.com>.

## Share an Idea

Leaders are in a unique position to recognize the ideas and tools that are most relevant and useful for their teams. If you only have a few minutes, consider sharing an idea or tool from this topic with your team or peers that is relevant and timely to their situation.

For example, consider sending one of the three recommended ideas or tools below to your team with your comments or questions on how the idea or tool can be of value to your organization. By simply sharing the item, you can easily engage others in important conversations and activities relevant to your goals and priorities.

[How is your team doing?](#)

[Tips for balancing bossing with empowering](#)

[Groupthink assessment](#)

To share an idea, tip, step, or tool with your comments via e-mail, select the EMAIL link in the upper right corner of the page that contains the idea, tip, step, or tool that you wish to share.

## Discussion 1: Selecting a decision process

Lack of clarity about your team's decision process can have serious consequences. For example, members of your team may be unable to arrive at agreement on how to handle an issue that arises. Or someone ends up making a decision, but the remaining team members don't support it wholeheartedly.

To avoid these scenarios, you and your team need to do three things: (1) gain familiarity with symptoms suggesting that the team lacks clarity around decision making; (2) select decision-making approaches to use during your work together; and (3) know how to deal with decision-related problems that can arise even if you've defined how you'll make decisions together.

Use these resources to lead a discussion with your team about these important aspects of decision making.

Download resources:

[Discussion Invitation: Selecting a Decision Process](#)

[Discussion Guide: Selecting a Decision Process](#)

[Discussion Slides: Selecting a Decision Process \(optional\)](#)

[Tips for Preparing for and Leading the Discussion](#)

*Note:* You can use this discussion with a team you've just started working with, or a team with which you're starting a new project.

Working through the discussion guide can take up to 45 minutes. If you prefer a shorter 15- or 30-minute session, you may want to focus only on those concepts and activities most relevant to your situation.

## Discussion 2: Managing conflicts in your team

In any team, conflict is inevitable. It's how the leader manages conflicts that strongly determines whether the team will succeed. For your team members who have direct reports, inability to resolve conflicts effectively in their teams can erode team morale and productivity. That's bad news not only for them but also for you and your entire organization.

To manage conflict effectively, your team members need to first recognize the symptoms that disagreements in their teams have reached destructive levels. They then need to apply a disciplined process for turning unproductive conflict into productive resolution.

Use these resources to lead a discussion with your team about how to resolve conflicts in their teams.

Download resources:

[Discussion Invitation: Managing Conflicts in Your Team](#)

[Discussion Guide: Managing Conflicts in Your Team](#)

[Discussion Slides: Managing Conflicts in Your Team \(optional\)](#)

[Tips for Preparing for and Leading the Discussion](#)

*Note:* If your team has few members with direct reports of their own, consider partnering with a colleague to co-lead this discussion for your combined teams.

Working through the discussion guide can take up to 45 minutes. If you prefer a shorter 15- or 30-minute session, you may want to focus only on those concepts and activities most relevant to your situation.

## Start a Group Project

Just like any change effort, successfully incorporating new skills and behaviors into one's daily activities and habits takes time and effort. After reviewing or discussing the concepts in this topic, your direct reports will still need your support to fully apply new concepts and skills. They will need to overcome a variety of barriers including a lack of time, lack of confidence, and a fear of making mistakes. They will also need opportunities to hone their skills and break old habits. To help ensure



their success, you can provide safe opportunities for individuals and your team as a whole to practice and experiment with new skills and behaviors on the job.

For example, to encourage the adoption of new norms, you can provide your team members with coaching, feedback, and additional time to complete tasks that require the use of new skills. Management approaches such as these will encourage team members to experiment with new skills until they become proficient.

Group learning projects provide another valuable technique for accelerating team members' development of new behaviors. A group learning project is an on-the-job activity aimed at providing team members with direct experience implementing their new knowledge and skills. Through a learning project, team members discover how new concepts work in the context of their situation, while simultaneously having a direct and tangible impact on the organization.

The documents below provide steps, tips, and a template for initiating a group learning project with your team, along with two project recommendations for this topic.

Download resources:

[Tips for Initiating and Supporting a Learning Project](#)

[Learning Project Plan Template](#)

[Learning Project: Improve Your Team's Effectiveness](#)

[Learning Project: Foster a Strong Sense of Identity in Your Team](#)

## Diagnosing and Fixing Dysfunctional Teams

[Anne Field. "Diagnosing and Fixing Dysfunctional Teams." \*Harvard Management Update\*, March 2009.](#)

[Download file](#)

### Summary

No team is perfect. Teams are made up of fallible human beings; they have flaws and failings. But what happens when a team's failings are so serious that they can't get their job done? Find out how you, as a team leader, can identify and fix the most common causes of team dysfunction: lack of trust, the inability to engage in productive conflict, and insufficient clarity of purpose.

## Tension in Teams

[Jim Kling. "Tension in Teams." \*Harvard Management Update\*, January 2009.](#)

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### Summary

Conflict within teams is inevitable. And that's a good thing, because conflict is essential to the creative collaboration that is a team's *raison d'être*. Without differences of opinion, there can be no debate over important issues or a creative synthesis of ideas. So how can you, as a team leader, manage conflict to get the best out of your team? This article offers several suggestions: (1) Set up ground rules, in advance, for handling conflict; (2) Build cohesion and trust by providing opportunities for team

members to get to know one another on a personal level; (3) When conflict arises, focus on the facts and make sure those involved fully understand each other's point of view; (4) Model the behavior you'd like others on your team to exhibit in the face of conflict; and (5) Intercede if the conflict between team members becomes personal. Your ultimate goal is self-governance: once team members learn how to handle conflicts on their own, those same conflicts will contribute to the team's success.

## What a Star—What a Jerk

Sarah Cliffe, Mary Rowe, Chris McKenzie, Chuck McKenzie, Kathy Jordan, and James Waldroop. "What a Star—What a Jerk." *Harvard Business Review*, September 2001.

[Download file](#)

### Summary

After a long stint in consulting, Jane Epstein has just become a manager at TechniCo. She's trying to get a fix on the various personalities and roles of her new coworkers, and by and large, she seems to have inherited a pretty good team. One's got a lot of social capital built up; another seems to be a natural salesperson. Something about Andy Zimmerman, though, has her worried. At first she can't put her finger on it—maybe he's a bit too aggressive? But as time passes, she watches Andy's mean streak show itself again and again: He belittles administrative assistants for minor mistakes, ruthlessly cuts down colleagues when they present ideas that aren't fully developed, and makes everyone in the group feel small and stupid. But Andy has another side: He's usually right, and he's very, very good at his job. In fact, in terms of pure performance, he's the best Jane's got. She'd be crazy not to want him in her group. And yet, she can't deny that Andy's behavior is undermining morale and hurting the team's financial performance. Now Jane's feeling frustrated. When she left her consulting job for this position, she expected to focus on numbers, products, customers—on building something. Instead, she finds that people issues are taking up most of her time. This fictional case study explores the dynamics that occur when a star performer has a highly abrasive personality.